Research Insights from Scotland

Moray House Read, Write, Count Collaborative Group

Gale Macleod | University of Edinburgh,

Alison Prentice | Bonaly Primary

Elsbeth Helfer | Tulliallan Primary

Mhairi McNeill | City of Edinburgh

Moray House Read Write Count

- Collaborative partnership between City of Edinburgh, Scottish Book Trust and Moray House School of Education and Sport

- Set up in 2016 to support activities which encourage a family learning (FL) approach to promoting parental engagement using the SBT's Read, Write, Count (RWC) Book Bags.

- The Collaborative group is an example of sustainable partnership working, one outcome of which is user-informed research and peer-reviewed publications

Origins and aims of the group

- Desire to work closely with and support practitioners

- Concern with poverty-related attainment gap

- Local authority identified parental engagement and family learning as areas that could benefit from a partnership

- Recognition that there is a gap in ITE in relation to parental involvement/ engagement and FL and learning at home

- Projects which benefit all members of the group and which use the RWC resources to support parental engagement and family learning

Group members

- Moray House School of Education and Sport
- City of Edinburgh Council
  - Community Learning
  - School Psychological Services
  - QIOs Literacy
  - Libraries
- Scottish Book Trust
  - Read, Write, Count team

This focus this afternoon

➢ Student teacher experiences of an reflections on involvement with MHRWC projects (Alison Prentice and Elsbeth Helfer)

➢ Some of the published research we have generated (Gale Macleod)

➢ The perspective from the wider MHRWC group and the importance of family learning (Mhairi McNeill)

Family learning & parental/ carer engagement
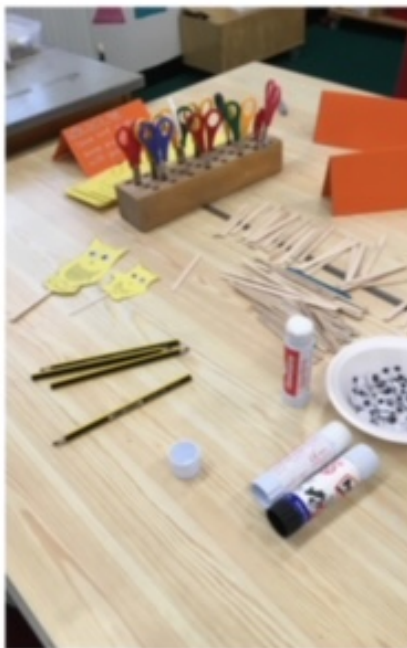
A student placement experience

3 Key Topics

- The training during PGDE (initial teacher education)
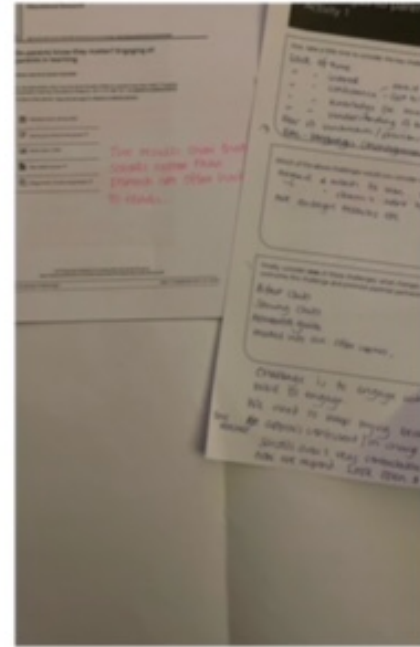
- Subsequent experience during career

- Reflections and challenges

Training during PGDE

- Parental engagement was briefly covered in a lecture/workshop

- The most useful training was optional

- Attendance at a Read, Write, Count (RWC) training session

- Attended sessions at the Book Trust and further RWC training

- Organised & ran a Bookbug family 'gifting' session

Read, Write, Count: Teacher Guide

The Bookbug Picture Book Prize
Scotland's favourite picture books as voted for by children

scottishbooktrust

Subsequent experience during career

- Experience as a parent had big influence

- Applied learnings during probation

- There can be a reluctance to engage

THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Moray House School of
Education and Sport

◆EDINBVRGH◆
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

READ
WRITE
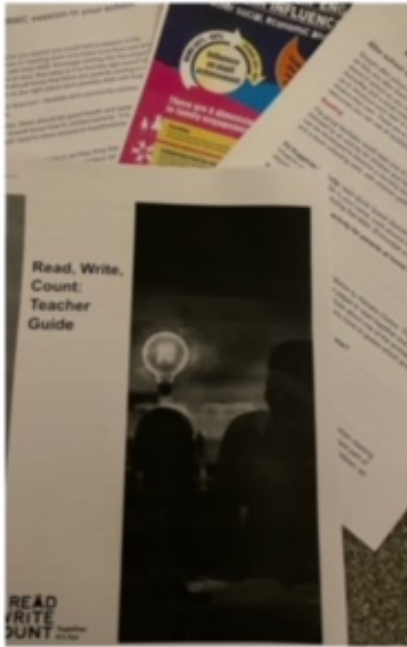COUNT **Together it's fun**

Reflections

- "Hard to reach parents often see the school as hard to reach."
  (Leading Parent Partnership Award)

- "Most parents feel unable to support their children's learning beyond practical terms, especially as their academic capabilities are pushed to the limit once they reach secondary school."
  (Parents as Partners, 'Harder to Engage' Parents, DCSF)

Summary and key learning

- More practical sessions for teachers
- How to reach the 'hard to reach'
- The most effective engagement is simple
- Relationships are key – best way to involve all

My ITE experiences

RWC session with family learning worker

Lectures referencing importance of Family Learning/ Parental Engagement

Engaging with masters students, participating in research interviews

Contact with research team – included, awareness of research and literature around Fl/PE

Impact

Attitude: teachers as partners, FL/PE not an optional extra

Awareness of RWC and value of resources

A range of FL/PE activities

Covid – positive and negative changes to FL/PE

Reflections

Traditional partnerships remain the norm – unequal relationship

Fear of scrutiny /criticism

Difficulty gathering input from families

Desire for authentic partnerships

Moving towards an understanding of FE as a core responsibility of schools

ITE offers unique opportunities to engage more widely

For schools, ongoing engagement with research and literature is vital

Our collaborative work

- ITE students helping out with workshops run by FL professionals (Elsbeth and Mhairi)

- Workshops for students (Alison)

- Research on older primary pupils' views on home/ school relationships

- Researching problems posed by partners in practice

- Family learning videos for schools and families

- Webinars for students and teachers

- Lectures as part of literacy strand of ITE programmes

- Input to CLPL run by RICs/ Education Scotland/ Local Authorities

Our published research

Macleod, G., and Tett, L. (2019) 'I had some additional angel wings': parents positioned as experts in their children's education, *Intl J of Lifelong Education*, 38(2): 171-183

Tett, L., and Macleod, G. (2020) Enacting home–school partnerships: the roles of headteachers, family-learning practitioners and parents, *Cam J Educ*, 50(4): 451-468.

Chen, D. and Macleod, G. (2021) Effectiveness of Digital Tools to Support Pupils' Reading in Secondary School – A Systematised Review, *Intl J of Mobile and Blended Learnin*g 13(2).

Macleod, G. and Tett, L. (2022) 'Family Literacy practices during COVID', chapter in Szech, L and Fox, K. (2022) 'Handbook of Research on Family Literacy Practices and Home School Connections'. Hershey, US: IGI Global

Macleod, G., Cebula, C., Renwick, A., Love-Gajardo, E., MacNeil, M., Jones, C., Clark, A., Larburn, R., Harwood, J., and I. Hearn. (2023, *forthcoming*) Older children negotiating relationships between home and school: A questionnaire-based study of 9-12 year olds in Scotland, *Scottish Education Review.*

Other research generated by the group

- MA (Primary) honours projects

- MSc Dissertations

- Evaluations of projects

Parental engagement, family learning and the attainment gap

- Parental engagement has a positive impact on children's achievement (Goodall, 2017; Wilder, 2014);

- Works best when aims to enhance what happens at home (Nutbrown, Bishop & Wheeler, 2015);

- Children become more confident about their learning capacities which in turn leads them to persist in the face of challenges (Horne & Haggart, 2004);

- Improvement in relationship between home and school, more supportive partnerships (van Steensel et al. 2011);

- Positive impact on parents' literacy, numeracy, communication, self-confidence and efficacy (Swain, Brooks & Bosley, 2014).

A 'Funds of knowledge' approach

- Builds on the knowledge that parents already have.
- Assumes that parents have an equal role to play with teachers in educating their children.
- Sees education as a co-operative activity involving respect and trust between teachers and parents valuing the knowledge that each brings.
- Supports parents to fulfil their aspirations and further develop their own expertise as their children's first educators.
- Focuses on the resources and practices that parents bring and builds on, rather than denigrates, their expertise.
- Consistently shown to lead to more effective learning (e.g. Barton et al, 2007; Tett, 2020)
- from González, Moll, & Amanti (2005).

A 'deficit' approach

- Gives priority to the school/ HT's agenda;

- Tends to emphasise parents' lack of knowledge;

- Does not consider unequal power relationships that can shape Home-School Partnerships (HSP);

- Assumes that parents should fit into the dominant school culture;

- Positions school staff as the experts giving knowledge to parents;

- Often assumes that the 'problem' is lack of aspiration and that participation will help to raise parents' aspirations, but

- Research shows parental aspirations already high - (e.g. Kirk et al. 2011)

Research conducted on FL and HSP

Focus was on FL in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in one Scottish city.

Small-scale (21 participants: 10 parents, 6 FL practitioners and 5 Head Teachers), interview-based, retrospective study.

Key questions:

- How do the different actors involved in FL programmes experience them? - published in Macleod and Tett (2019)

- What makes for more inclusive HSPs? - published in Tett and Macleod (2020)

Findings

- Where HTs' conceptualisations of the purpose of FL programmes are focused solely on the school's agenda then this makes HSPs difficult to achieve.

- FL professionals can mitigate some of these adverse impacts on parents and can help make bridging links between home and school.

- Evidence of all of *nominal, traditional* and *authentic* partnerships (Auerbach, 2010) in the schools.

Nominal	Traditional	Authentic
Involving parents is beneficial - as long as they contribute to helping the school increase pupils' attainment	School is at the centre of the partnership. Direction of the relationship is one-way from the school to the parents and community	Based on an analysis of unequal power relations
The 'good' parent does not intervene in the teaching and learning activities at the core of the school	Parents play a useful role in their children's education. Their knowledge is defined by what they lack. Little recognition of the unequal relationships of power that parents experience	Parents seen as allies, advocates, and leaders. Parents have knowledge that is equally valuable to that held by the school staff
Parents can feel alienated because they are not seen as people that have valued knowledge about their children's learning therefore are reluctant to engage with the school	Parents may feel involved in the school but have little influence on what happens there.	Parents feel that they have more agency by having some of their own cultural practices recognised.

Participation in FL programmes had a significant and lasting impact on parents

- Understanding how the every-day activities they do with their children can be learning experiences;

- Knowledge and skills to manage their children's behaviour;

- Having their own knowledge valued gave them confidence that they were able to learn, and so help to teach their children;

- The supportive social space, where their goals were respected, facilitated wider social networks that led to personal development.

Increase in confidence leads to other impacts

Participation in FL has not only impacted on parents' self-confidence but also raised their horizons of possibility so that they considered that they could embark on new careers and ways of being.

> *"I felt more confident. I was confident enough to apply for college. It made me a more confident parent with the girls, it made me more confident in what I could achieve myself."*

What can schools do?

Not every school can employ, or has access to a family learning worker with a Community Learning/ Adult Education background, but…

- Schools can recognise the contributions parents can make and aim to empower them;
- Provide training and support for staff to share values underpinning FLNOS;
- Adopt outward facing strategy that involves the views of parents as well as the expertise of other schools and services in the community;
- Engage in pro-active collaboration with families that is sensitive to their circumstances and accords with their values.
- Make the school environment welcoming; a place for parents.

Enabling parents to be seen as experts through choice of activity

- Williams & Williams' (2020) study of a maths homework project found that using problems based on lived experience, such as managing money or wrapping a parcel, led to much more engagement.

- This approach enabled parents to be seen as experts, so children were more willing to accept parental feedback and this enhanced parents' self-confidence.

Family Learning and schools

- FL is a distinct approach to working with families which is based on a set of principles and values – these will not (yet!) be familiar to everyone in Education

- A culture shift is required in many schools to support a move away from *Nominal* and *Traditional* HSP.

- Embracing FL can help schools make this transition.

- There is robust research evidence that doing so will make a contribution to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Reflections on embedding PE/PI/ FL/ L@H into ITE

- Collaborative approaches are a 'win-win'
- Think locally and build sustainable networks
- Keep things flexible to allow for quick responses
- It's not an either/or research or teaching
- Draw on students' expertise
- Just do it!

Aims and Outcomes of the first project

- To enable teachers in training to develop their skills/practice around parental engagement

- To increase confidence in working with parents in a school setting

- We held workshops at MH, then asked students to work alongside FL workers to deliver RWC sessions in schools

- Some MA Primary students evaluated the project

What did we do?

We met with parents in the school library and looked at the contents of the RWC bag, talked about RWC. We introduced ways of using Blooms Taxonomy questions. We then joined the children in their classroom, read one of the stories from the bag, and did an activity related to that book.

Emphasis on giving parents tools to support the skills children need to become an engaged reader – making the point that the workshops are not about making parents substitute teachers.

Ways to interact with their child included asking questions about the text/making a puppet to retell the story/encouraging children to predict what will happen next.

What happened as a result?

- By engaging with parents in this way, teachers should be able to support them to develop their own expertise as their child's first educators, and focus less on school staff being seen as experts giving knowledge to parents. Co-operative activities build respect and trust between teachers and parents.

- Our research showed that workshops with parents made a positive difference to how often the resources were used at home, and to parents levels of confidence in supporting their children's learning.

Obstacles we had to overcome

- Lack of time within students timetables

- Permission needed from placement schools

- Lack of knowledge about RWC and depth of resources available in schools

- Not all schools have a culture of offering opportunities to engage parents

A Family Learning approach in schools

Family Learning refers to any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family.

- Equal partnership is the basis for all developments in FL: all learners and educators recognise that they can frequently exchange ideas.

- FL recognises the role of the parent as first educator

- FL raises aspirations and all outcomes of the process, including those which may not be overt, are of equal significance and importance

(Further reading: "I had some additional angel wings": Parents positioned as experts in their children's education)

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